



LONESOME WOOD VEGETATION MANGEMENT 2 – PROJECT SUMMARY

The Gallatin National Forest (GNF) is requesting comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Lonesome Wood Vegetation Management 2 Project.

The Hebgen Lake Ranger District of the GNF proposes to reduce wildland fuels within the wildland urban interface (WUI) and to reinvigorate aspen forest along the Hebgen Lake Road (FSR #167). The proposal includes treatments on approximately 2,900 acres along the Road, including 2525 acres of forest thinning and 325 acres of small tree slashing followed by prescribed burning. Approximately 5-6 miles of temporary road construction would be needed to complete the project.

The project area is located about 12 air miles west of West Yellowstone, MT along the west shore of Hebgen Lake and the Hebgen Lake Road (FSR #167). This project is designed to increase firefighter and public safety, reduce wildland fire risks to both private and Forest Service properties that have been identified in the WUI including the evacuation routes, and to reinvigorate aspen forest. The project area includes many private residences and 34 summer homes. There are three heavily used camp-grounds and several dispersed campsites in the project area. The primary access road is 18 miles long; starting as a two-lane road off of Hwy 20 then tapers to a narrow dead end.

During the scoping comment period, primary issues raised by the public included concern for public safety, impacts to wildlife and whether the proposed treatments would effectively reduce wildland fuel hazard. Three alternatives were analyzed in detail. Alternative 1 – The No Action Alternative, in which the project area would have no fuels reduction or aspen reinvigoration. The area would be subject to natural or ongoing changes only. Alternative 2 - The Proposed Action is designed to reduce the wildland fire risk to life and property in the wildland urban interface and evacuation routes for this WUI and to reinvigorate aspen forest. The proposed action is the preferred alternative. The proposed action meets the purpose and need most effectively and incorporates virtually all mitigation and design change developed throughout the analysis process and previous decision effort. Alternative 3 –Mitigated Alternative is designed to address the same goals as Alternative 2 with the reconfiguration and reduction of acres designed to reduce impacts to moose winter habitat. These alternatives comply with all applicable direction for all resources. Mitigation that is included minimizes potential impacts and includes design changes that address landowner and permittee concerns. As proposed, all project work would be completed within 6-10 years, once implementation begins after a decision. A decision is expected in 2012.

Approximately 370 acres of the proposed treatments are in the Lionhead Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA). Treatments in the roadless area are designed to restore ecosystem composition and structure by removing generally small diameter trees. Approximately 295 acres of thinning is



focused on ladder fuels, which are generally less than six inches in diameter. Another 25 acres is proposed for prescribed burning with some slashing of small trees as a pre-treatment. About 50 acres is proposed for mechanical thinning of generally small diameter trees. No temporary or permanent roads are proposed in the inventoried roadless area. As proposed, the treatments adhere to current direction for IRAs.

Six additional alternatives were considered but not carried forward for detailed study. These alternatives responded to scoping requests to consider an alternative that was limited to prescribed burning; alternatives that do not allow any temporary roads or fuel breaks, two alternatives that consider larger or smaller evacuation route areas; and an alternative with no logging in the Roadless Area (IRA).

The following issues/resources were analyzed:

Fire/Fuels

Inventoried Roadless Areas

Moose Winter habitat

Biodiversity

Fish and Amphibian

Range

Scenery

Soils

Water Quality

Grizzly Bear

Air Quality

Economics

Invasive Weeds

Recreation, Outfitting and Special uses

Sensitive Plants

Transportation

Wildlife – Management Indicator Species,

Sensitive Species, Migratory Birds and Other

Based on the evaluation of the alternatives, as well as public input, the deciding officer (Gallatin Forest Supervisor) will determine what, if anything, should be done to reduce wildfire risks to life and property in the wildland urban interface/evacuation route in the Lonesome Wood Vegetation Management 2 Project area; what if anything should be done to reinvigorate aspen communities in the project area; and what associated activities, mitigation measures, restoration actions and monitoring requirements would be included in the decision.